

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for
Nominations Hearing
May 24, 2005

Today, the Foreign Relations Committee meets to consider nominees to five key diplomatic posts. Joining us are Mr. Eduardo Aguirre, Jr., who has been nominated to be ambassador to Spain and Andorra; Ms. Victoria Nuland, who has been nominated to the rank of ambassador in association with her role as the U.S. Permanent Representative on the Council to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Ms. Julie Finley, who has been nominated to the rank of ambassador in association with her role as the U.S. Representative to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe; Ambassador John Tefft, who has been nominated to be ambassador to Georgia; and Ambassador Craig Stapleton, who has been nominated to be ambassador to France. We welcome the nominees and look forward to our discussions with them.

Mr. Eduardo Aguirre is currently serving as Director for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services at the Department of Homeland Security. He also has served as Vice Chairman of the Export-Import Bank of the United States. If confirmed as Ambassador to Spain and Andorra, he would bring a wealth of public and private experience to this assignment.

As a member of NATO since 1982, Spain has been a valued ally and participant in international security activities. The United States and Spain traditionally have had a good relationship, but have experienced friction since Spain's March 2004 parliamentary elections. Prime Minister Zapatero, whose Socialist Party had campaigned on a pledge to remove Spanish forces from Iraq, has shifted Spain's foreign policy away from the strongly pro-U.S. stance of the previous Aznar government.

Since last November, however, the Spanish government has made several overtures aimed at improving relations. Spain has agreed to contribute a Provincial Reconstruction Team and co-lead the forward support base at Herat as part of NATO's mission in Afghanistan. It also has proposed training Iraqi police and troops outside of Iraq. Our next ambassador must build on these positive developments.

Ms. Victoria Nuland is an accomplished Foreign Service Officer with 21 years of experience. She has been serving as Principal Deputy National Security Advisor to Vice President Cheney. Prior to her current position, she served as Deputy Chief of Mission at NATO headquarters in Brussels. Ms. Nuland also has held important assignments dealing with the states of the former Soviet Union.

Since the end of the Cold War, the NATO alliance has been evolving to meet the new security needs of the 21st Century. In this era, the threats to Europe and America originate primarily from outside Europe, particularly from the Greater Middle East. There is now strong support among members for NATO's operations in Afghanistan, and for its training mission in Iraq. NATO's viability as an effective alliance depends on flexible and creative leadership and the willingness of allies to take on new missions and improve joint capabilities.

Over the last several years, our relations with Europe have been strained. President Bush's recent trip to Europe marked a turning point in the relationship, as both sides sought to establish common ground. I am optimistic that U.S.-European relations will continue to improve. Our mission to NATO will play an important role in that process.

Ms. Julie Finley is highly regarded for her work to promote democracy abroad. She currently serves as Trustee and Treasurer for the National Endowment for Democracy and Chairman of the Project on Transitional Democracies. She also serves as Advisory Council Member for the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Brookings Institution, and the Woodrow Wilson Center. She was a Founder and Board Member of the U.S. Committee on NATO, which was established in 1996 as a bipartisan citizen's initiative to support NATO enlargement.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe is the largest regional security organization in the world with 55 participating States from Europe, Central Asia, and North America. Since its founding in 1975, it has

been active in conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation. It is a key instrument for promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and encouraging open and transparent economies.

American leadership in the OSCE can be an important tool for advancing democracy and fundamental freedoms, as well as arms control, economic prosperity, and sustainable environmental policies. In the post-Communist era, the OSCE has made a significant contribution toward achieving the goal of a Europe whole, free, and at peace. The OSCE also has an important role to play in helping to win the global war against terrorism.

Ambassador John Tefft is a 33-year veteran of the Foreign Service who has already served with distinction in some of our most important diplomatic posts. He is currently serving as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs. Previously, he served as Ambassador to Lithuania and Deputy Chief of Mission in Moscow. He also has experience at our missions in Rome, Budapest, and Jerusalem.

As a steadfast partner in the global war on terror, Georgia has increased its troop commitment in Iraq, and has contributed troops to Afghanistan, as well as to the peacekeeping mission in Kosovo.

The democratic forces that spearheaded the peaceful "Rose Revolution" are continuing to lead Georgia into the community of democratic nations. Georgia has signed a partnership and cooperation agreement with the European Union, and it is participating in NATO's Partnership for Peace program. At home, Georgia is moving forward on a reform agenda, which includes privatizing nearly all state-owned property and cracking down on corruption.

The United States must help Georgia build upon this progress. As with other nations struggling to solidify democracy, we must continue to bolster Georgia's efforts with financial and technical assistance. Georgia has become an important friend and ally to the United States and to Europe, and we look forward to all that we can achieve together.

Ambassador Craig Stapleton served as Ambassador to the Czech Republic during the first term of the current Bush Administration. After his service, he returned to the private sector in Connecticut, where he has been a civic and business leader. Ambassador Stapleton also served with distinction on the Peace Corps National Advisory Council. A French speaker, he will bring extensive experience and leadership to this important post.

The United States and France have a long history of friendship. We share common values and have parallel interests on many political, economic, and security issues. Despite the sharp disagreement over Iraq, our relationship with France has improved in recent months.

France is one of NATO's top military contributors. The French currently lead NATO forces in Kosovo, are participating in NATO military operations in Afghanistan and have offered to train 1,500 Iraqi police outside of Iraq. The French military has been an active supporter of NATO's modernization and is a leading contributor to the NATO Response Force.

The next ambassador to France must pay special attention to events related to the development of the European Union. On May 29th, France will hold a referendum on the European Union's constitutional treaty. Despite France's commitment to the EU and President Chirac's strong support of the treaty, opinion polls suggest that the vote will be close. A growing number of French citizens apparently are concerned that the constitution cedes too much power to Brussels. The constitution must be approved by all EU member states before it can go into force. A defeat in France would have far-reaching consequences for European integration. This issue has salience for the United States as we devise trade and security policies, particularly since the U.S. is the largest foreign investor in France.

I congratulate each of you on your nomination. I ask that you deliver your statements in the order that you were introduced. If you are summarizing a statement, the text of your entire presentation will be included in the hearing record. Also, please introduce family and friends that may have accompanied you on this important occasion.

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